

FirstNet aims to release final RFP by end of 2015

Fierce Wireless Tech By Monica Allevan

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The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) plans to hold an Industry Day in early 2015 for potential vendors and hopes to release a final request for proposal (RFP) by the end of 2015, according to an *Urgent Communications* report.

In a webinar examining the progress of the public-safety broadband project within states, FirstNet Director of Outreach Amanda Hilliard said the organization has conducted a number of outreach efforts and those are ongoing.

Just last month, FirstNet released two documents that will help formulate its RFP. The organization put out a request for information (RFI) that seeks to better understand the industry's current capabilities and how to best leverage existing resources; responses to that 15-point document are due Oct. 17. Separately, a public notice was released in an attempt to gather input and definitions for terms such as "core" and "radio access network," and those comments are due Oct. 24, she said.

FirstNet is conducting consultations with each state and U.S. territory. Two of them, with Maryland and Minnesota, have been completed. Two more are scheduled this month with Oregon and Washington, with the goal of completing eight consultations by the end of 2014. Meetings with 19 other states that have returned the prerequisite consultation checklist will be scheduled for 2015, she said.

Maryland was the first state to conduct a consultation. Lori Stone, the state's broadband coordinator, said during the webinar that while not everyone can be included in the consultation, it was important to have interaction with folks in the IT departments within state and local government offices. "We realize we have to reach out beyond our traditional public safety users, to the people who really keep the network running," she said.

In Oregon, officials have conducted 175 on-site discussions with local officials, according to Steve Noel, the FirstNet single point of contact (SPOC) for the state.

"Even though we've been out quite a bit and we've hit a lot of our stakeholders, we still have audiences where a lot of people still don't know a whole lot about FirstNet," he said, adding that he recommends it's never too early to start working on outreach. "We want the locals to become champions for what we're doing here and as well as for a national FirstNet, that's kind of our game plan."

Darryl Anderson, director of multi-agency radio communication systems (MARCS) for the state of Ohio, said the state has ongoing interaction with wireless carriers and public utilities and wants to hear from anyone who wants to weigh in on realizing FirstNet's vision. "If they want to reach out to us, that's fine," he said. "We're all in the same, I think, boat, if you will, in that we're anxiously awaiting more detail."

As for state and local governments wondering whether to upgrade their LMR systems now or reconsider investments with the knowledge that FirstNet is coming, Bill Schrier, state of Washington, office of CIO, noted that King County, which surrounds Seattle, is considering a multi-hundred million dollar upgrade to its LMR.

"My advice to them? Upgrade your LMR. Don't depend on LTE and mission critical voice, which are going to be relatively new technologies even five years from now, for your critical response," he said. "Upgrade your LMR... We know how it works. We know it's rock solid. We need it."

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